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SUBJECT: NORWAY'S ENIGMATIC IRAQI POPULATION: A RISK FOR RADICALIZATION?

REF: OSLO 207

Classified By: Acting DCM Kristen F. Bauer for reasons 1.4 b and d

**¶11. (C) SUMMARY:** An increasingly large Iraqi population in Norway (over 22,000, which constitutes the third largest group of immigrants, and second largest among non-Europeans) continues to remain out of the spotlight, neither actively engaged in politics as is the long-established Pakistani population, nor a subject of media hysteria, as is the Somali population (see Reftel). Efforts to find reliable (non-Kurdish) community leaders that speak for the population have been frustrating, both for post and for the Norwegian government, which is concerned about growing numbers of fraudulent asylum applications from Iraqis but lacks the resources to fully investigate the situation. Statistics that the government has gathered on the Iraqi community show that they suffer the same unemployment and educational challenges as other 'new' communities. END SUMMARY.

**WHO ARE THE IRAQIS IN NORWAY?**

**¶12. (U)** The majority of Iraqis residing in Norway have arrived in the last nine years, with a peak of 4,400 arriving in 2000. This wave of asylum seekers and refugees is expected to continue, meaning that the population will likely continue to grow at a rapid clip in the years to come unless Norwegian authorities decide to tighten their policies. The Iraqis community tends to have large families, with 3.3 children per family, compared to 2.0 for all women in Norway and only behind the Somali and Pakistani population in this regard. Less than half of the male population is employed, and less than a quarter of the women. Educational statistics are unreliable, but general indications are that the educational level is low. Only 8 percent of the 19-24 age group is in higher education, compared to 31 percent of the general Norwegian populace.

**¶13. (C)** A discussion with an employee at UDI, the GON office responsible for immigration and refugee/asylum processing, provided insight into the GON's growing concern that fraudulent claims are becoming more common among Iraqi applicants. For example, a significant number of those claiming to be Assyrian Christians from Iraq have been identified as fakes by the existing community in Norway (instead, they were Sunni Muslims). Our contact mentioned that their most effective tool in determining the validity of addresses and applicant backgrounds in Iraq is by using Google Earth to see if the area that applicants claim to come from exists and accurately reflects their religious/ethnic background. Otherwise they are very much operating in the dark, he says, when it comes to determining the actual identity of some Iraqi applicants.

**¶14. (C)** The GON and post have had difficulties in identifying reliable community leaders in the Iraqi community. Although our UDI contact believes that many of them are silent due in part to their physical absence. He claims that many of them register in Norway and then spend their time in neighboring

Sweden, which has a larger Iraqi population and more media/stores catering to their needs). The statistics do not seem to bear that out, as the majority of the Iraqis in Norway do not live in border towns as he claims, but in Oslo, Bergen and other high-population areas, much like the Somali and Afghani populations. The Statistical Bureau's 2007 report on the Iraqi population in Norway notes that the high unemployment, low education, and lack of involvement in the community is comparable to the other 'new' immigrant groups - neither significantly worse nor better. The only two statistical items that stand out are that Iraqis are over-represented in the hotel and restaurant industries and that their rate of inter-marriage with Norwegians is higher than other populations. Although neither of those statistics is determinative, on the surface they suggest that the population is less isolated than the Somalis, Afghans, or Pakistanis: a positive sign for integration.

#### ARE THEY A THREAT?

¶15. (C) The enigmatic nature of the Iraqi population in Norway is unsettling to some. TV2 reporter Kadafi Zaman (of Pakistani descent) requested a private meeting with the Pol office in early 2007 to discuss growing concerns about 'the Shia population' (including, in part, Iraqis) in Norway, which he had been surreptitiously videotaping as an undercover reporter for several months. Although nothing came of the story idea because he could not find proof of illicit activity, it reflects the suspicious that these new immigrants are somehow going to bring the violence of the region with them to Norway.

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¶16. (C) The single most prominent Iraqi in Norway is Najmuddin Faraj, (aka Mullah Krekar) the former leader of the Ansar al Islam group. Krekar has been declared a threat to national security and is awaiting deportation, due to his previous activities and published statements calling for jihad. He has lost all appeals of this decision most recently on November 12, 2007 when Norway's Supreme Court upheld previous court decisions which expelled him from Norway. Due to human rights concerns, the GON has determined that he cannot be deported to Iraq. He has shown a deft touch with the media and remains a media figure, with a profile of his situation appearing June 13, in a major newspaper's magazine. Krekar remains under virtual house arrest and cannot be considered a representative of the larger Iraqi community but is the most visible.

¶17. (C) Odd Olsen Ingero, the director of Kripo (National Criminal Investigation Service), says his organization is increasingly concerned about the Iraqi influx. They assess that most of the jobs they have in the restaurant and car-washing business are simply covers for multi-faceted criminal activities. This prompted Kripo to do a formal threat assessment which highlighted concerns to the broader law enforcement community. The Iraqi community's use of fraudulent passports has been of one of the main concerns, and has been discussed in cables from both Oslo and Stockholm (Iraq's mission in Sweden covers Norway). There is an additional complication, which is that some who carry Iraqi passports are not really Iraqi.

¶18. (C) However, unlike the Somali population, which has been portrayed in the media again and again as a significant problem due to gang violence, the import of Khat, female genital mutilation, and a public downtown beating of a female activist, the Iraqi population has so far remained out of the spotlight. Although post has been approached by both Kurdish political activists for support in their efforts to promote a Kurdish homeland, the population has generally remained off of the public radar. There are concerns by GON officials, but they seem to be trumped by other priority populations, such as the Somalis, absent any incidents involving the Iraqi community which would indicate radicalization.

WHITNEY